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FROM WASHINGTON STRAIGHT / JOHN McLAUGHLIN

SPIES OUT IN THE COLD

AFTER TWO months of speculation on who would succeed William Casey as CIA Director, Deputy Director Robert Gates has been named to the position. With five years on the National Security Council staff, and 15 years with the CIA (four as Deputy Director for Intelligence, one as full Deputy Director), Gates is certainly eligible. The governing qualification—that the new DCI be able to prevent the Iran controversy from crippling the agency—furthered Robert Gates's candidacy, and finally clinched it.

The Iran affair, as it unfolds, is not dissimilar to the Watergate unpleasantness when the CIA's extra-legal activities made it the prime choice for White House scapegoating. Then, as now, the DCI (Richard Helms) stepped down and his successor (William Colby) was picked for the rites of purification (after James Schlesinger's five-month go at the job). At once, Colby began a quick bloodletting. The CIA's operational side—the cloak-and-dagger out-in-the-fielders—was decimated, leaving the agency stricken. Stansfield Turner, brought in by Jimmy Carter, then seized the Colby knife and sliced off another seven hundred mid- and senior-level operational staffers (the "Vietnam bulge"). Agency analysts gained from the purges, acquiring the bulk of the residual money and staff.

A In 1981, Bill Casey took over and stopped the massacre. A veteran intelligence hand during World War II, Casey organized the French Resistance and supported the Normandy invasion. In 1980, Casey managed Ronald Reagan's campaign and carried his belief in the President to his CIA position. Determined to make the Company an instrument of the Reagan Doctrine, Casey reincarnated the activist CIA. He backed covert operations in Nicaragua, Angola, and Afghanistan, doubled Carter's funding for counter-terrorism, and rehired covert operators in numbers. "Above all, he stressed hands-

on CIA workers over analysts," observes a CIA watcher here. "The information-gathering CIA became a covert participant in foreign policy, activist again, exactly what Reagan wanted."

Pragmatically contemptuous of Congress, Casey circumvented it when feasible, as with the mining of the Nicaraguan harbor. When the President instructed him not to tell the Hill about the Iran affair, the director readily obliged. Casey's staff loved the untethering. Morale and efficiency both have skyrocketed.

Then, in the fall of 1986, the CIA was struck by two blows: the uncovering of the Iran/Contra affair and the sad disablement of William Casey. Both in hot water and leaderless, the CIA idled as the White House pondered possible replacements: ex-Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker, former Senator John Tower, National Security Agency head Lieutenant General William Odom, Senator Malcolm Wallop, and super lawyer Edward Bennett Williams. In mid January, Baker was offered Casey's job but declined it principally on the basis of "what do I know about intelligence?" The offer then went to Gates who, like Baker, has rapport with Congress and, unlike him, knows the intelligence world.

A 43-year-old CIA careerist reared on the analytical, not operational side, Robert Gates graduated from William and Mary and holds an MA in history from Indiana University and a PhD in

Russian from Georgetown. Gates was appointed National Intelligence Officer for the Soviet Union under Stansfield Turner and was then fast-tracked to Deputy Director of Intelligence in 1982, under Casey. Over the years, Gates established a lawyerly reputation as cautious and intelligent but not, unlike his recent chief, risk-taking. "Gates is a caretaker, a capable one, but no activist," says a CIA insider.

ALREADY, GATES has opened a new CIA inquiry into the Iran/Contra affair. He has advised his staff to revise statements detailing their knowledge of the affair given under Casey, thus freeing them to add information previously undisclosed. Washington polls see this pre-emptive strike as evidence that Gates will keep Casey's CIA from being torn apart, as would likely happen were he to stiff the Hill.

On the other hand, Gates is not expected to serve up the CIA as sacrificial lamb by dismantling it *à la* Colby and Turner. "He'll keep the agency intact," says a Casey-appointed CIA staffer. "While he may not use the CIA's power, his successor will. It will all still be there."

Most likely, mainstream America will see and hear little about the change of power at the CIA. But the President will certainly notice: Casey put Ronald Reagan's interests above all else whereas Gates puts the Company's interests above all else. Admittedly, the appointment is not a bold stroke, and hard-liners are less than happy, but the appointment is a de facto recognition of two realities: the agency's standing on the Hill is precarious, and Gates as DCI has the image, brain, and inclination to thwart endless investigations. At a time when covert is again a soiled word, Robert "Mr. Clean" Gates will reflect agreeably on the Administration. □

